

Using Twitter to Build Community within Large Classes and Departments

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Extended Abstract

We teach in large core second year classes, Cell Biology and Diversity of Life, with approximately 400-600 students per year. In the past two years we have each introduced twitter accounts to our classes, @Dal_CellBio and @DalBiodiversity, which are used as a model of a professional account and a tool to build community. The intention of these accounts is to promote discipline-related articles and links, as opposed to using it as a class administration tool.

When initially developing these accounts, we were attentive to several small details. We started by checking in with our university social media policy. We paid particular attention to choosing a profile image that represented the “brand” of the account, choosing an account name that fit the required criteria of characters, yet was still adequately descriptive, and carefully reflecting on our initial motivations for the account.

Generally, the tweets that we publish on the account fall into several broad categories:

- Content specific (e.g. links to news articles in the field, or to articles to that relate to something students may have just heard in lecture or lab).
- Promotion of what is currently happening in our classes (e.g. photos from the lab).
- Promotion of university and departmental events (e.g. bake sales or job fairs).
- Some personal tweets if they can be related back to our subject areas or to the university (e.g. picture of my cat reading the course textbook).
- Some self-promotion regarding our own professional activities (e.g. a photo of me presenting at an ABLE conference!)

We believe that these class twitter accounts have allowed us to link our students to both local and global research and foster a sense of community through re-tweets and conversations.

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